

Producer Guidelines for Children's Content

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The following standards and guidelines apply to programs and digital content designed solely for children.

Issued by:

PBS Children's Programming

PBS KIDS Digital

Introduction

The following are guidelines for producers prepared by the PBS Children's Programming and PBS KIDS Digital departments. Producers must adhere to these guidelines, as well as to the processes and procedures set forth below for creative and standards reviews, input, and approval at various stages. Please keep in mind that the following summarizes the most common areas of concern and should not be considered to be all inclusive of Standards and Practices guidelines. These guidelines are being provided to you solely for your use in undertaking work on behalf of PBS, and may not be used for any other purpose, nor distributed to anyone other than those individuals employed by the Producer who are responsible for the creation of PBS programming, in accordance with any and all expectations of confidentiality pertaining to materials supplied by PBS to Producer.

Multi-Platform Content Development Strategy

PBS KIDS is committed to developing exceptional children's media content that is educational, engaging, and consistent across all delivery platforms. When developing a property for PBS KIDS, producers should consider how the characters, narratives, and educational goals of that property will exist on PBS KIDS television, a pbskids.org website, the PBS KIDS video players, mobile games and activities through the PBS KIDS app stores. Producers should also consider that property's potential for podcasts, digital ebooks, digital music, and other new media platforms used by children. This multi-platform plan should be thoughtful, true to the property's goals, and clearly communicated in proposals and budgets submitted to PBS KIDS. Your final production team should include individuals or identified vendor partners who possess the skills and development experience needed to achieve this multi-platform content production. The PBS KIDS team is happy to assist Producers in identifying potential partners and talent to help achieve this goal.

Parental Rating Information

According to the TV Parental Guidelines, PBS KIDS programs are branded with a TV-Y rating when broadcast on air. These programs are designed to be appropriate for all children. Whether animated or live-action, the themes and elements in these programs are specifically designed for a very young audience. These programs are not expected to frighten younger children. The shows are also designated as educational and informational (E/I).

Although PBS KIDS does not use a ratings system online, all PBS KIDS digital content should be appropriate for all children. All themes and content pieces are designed to be navigable by the target ages for that program and/or site. PBS KIDS digital content should meet the privacy and safety requirements outlined in the PBS KIDS Privacy Policy (<http://pbskids.org/privacy>).

THE PBS KIDS AUDIENCE

We ask producers to be aware that we serve a broad and diverse audience – one that includes low-income households, children living in rural communities, military and veteran families, language minority families, and families with limited access to technology. It is our mission and our responsibility to consider the needs of these families in the development and production of our content.

Diversity on PBS KIDS

PBS KIDS strives to reflect the diversity of its audience across television and digital platforms. All American children should see themselves represented on PBS KIDS. While not every program can represent each kind of diversity, producers are encouraged to find opportunities to create content that reflects the lives and distinct experiences of PBS KIDS viewers and users.

Diversity includes differences in race, gender, ability, family structure, ethnicity, cultural tradition, religion, socioeconomic status, regional location, and language.

In addition to primary characters and storylines, please consider live-action interstitials as an additional area to incorporate diversity in your series.

Educational Guidelines

In addition to high production and entertainment values, PBS children's content is distinguished by its solid educational value. Across our schedule, PBS seeks to provide our 2-8 year old viewers and visitors with engaging and appropriate content covering all aspects of child development and early learning. We routinely review our existing line-up to ensure that our schedule offers a variety of programming covering important developmental and curriculum areas including social and emotional learning, early language and literacy, math, science (including engineering and technology), social studies, the arts, and health and wellness.

The following standards apply:

- A) All programs accepted for our children's schedule must have explicit age-appropriate educational goals that are clearly incorporated into the program's storylines, character development, digital content and community engagement materials.** Educational goals should emanate from the main point of the program and should not feel forced. In addition, there should be consistency among the learning goals for each component of a program's total package. The PBS KIDS Learning Frameworks for Literacy-ELA, Mathematics, Social and Emotional Learning, Social Studies, and Science are all available as a resource to help with identifying age appropriate skills and concepts for children across the PBS KIDS audience age range.
- B) All programs should make use of child development and early learning research and best practices in selecting educational goals appropriate for the age range of the intended viewer.**
- C) All programs are required to include early childhood education consultants and advisors as ongoing members of the production team to ensure that the program and digital content are designed to meet the intended educational and entertainment goals.**
- D) All producers are encouraged to conduct ongoing formative and periodic evaluations of the programs and digital content to determine whether educational and entertainment goals are being met.** These evaluations at a minimum should include focus group testing and usability testing with children of the intended age range. Programs with specific embedded curriculum are also encouraged to gather data on the impact of the program on children's learning.

Entertainment Standard Guidelines

PBS takes great pride in creating content that educates and entertains children between the ages of 2 and 8. In recognition of the popularity of our programming with children, and because of our commitment to their welfare, we strive to be socially responsible in the content we create. PBS takes care not to frighten children or provoke anxiety by creating programs that contain realistic depictions of anti-social or ethically confusing behavior.

The following standards apply:

RESPECT FOR OTHERS

We are sensitive and thoughtful when stories involve race, gender, ethnicity, mental and physical ability, age, sexual orientation, socioeconomic class, religion, family structure, and/or body image in children's programming. Our goal is for all children to see themselves positively and authentically represented in our content.

- **In some cases, PBS may require that producers consult with members of the represented community (or communities), and/or expert advisors, to ensure a nuanced representation.** Consultation may include input on storylines, casting, costuming, accents, character behaviors and mannerisms, and more.
- **We avoid glamorizing anti-social behaviors such as physical violence, name-calling or eye-rolling and make it clear that such behaviors have negative outcomes and lead to consequences.** In addition, these activities are not portrayed in such detail as to be instructional or to invite imitation.
- **No racial and/or gender slurs, insulting or demeaning stereotypes, or dialogue that demeans, discredits, or defames an individual or group is permitted.**
- **Inappropriate language involving any level of profanity is not permitted.** Religious names, phrases, or symbols, used in a profane or disrespectful manner, are not allowed. "God," "Jesus," "Christ," "Buddha," "Mohammed," and "Holy Mary" are examples of sacred names that are not to be used as expletives.
- **The use of "bleeps" to imply profanity is not allowed in children's content.** In addition, abbreviated or leading phrases that suggest vulgarity such as "What the..." or "Holy..." are not allowed.

SAFETY AND WELL-BEING

- **We avoid mean-spirited storylines that could threaten a child's sense of well-being.** For example, stories about kidnapping, stories that use real world situations which put characters at risk, or putting characters in anxiety-producing environments or situations. Sadistic or masochistic treatment of humans or animals is not allowed on PBS KIDS.

- **Producers are encouraged to model characters making healthy choices related to nutrition and physical activity.**
- **Characters should model safe practices when riding in or operating vehicles.** This includes the depiction of proper use of helmets, seat belts, life preservers, etc. when appropriate.
- **Depiction of dangerous or illegal behaviors should be avoided.** Examples include:
 - The depiction of characters swallowing pills or capsules.
 - The depiction of children using hazardous household items such as razors, kitchen knives, or matches. If adults are shown using such implements, they are to do so in a manner that reflects proper safety guidelines for the items in question.
 - The depiction of dangerous, easily-mimicked activities, such as hitting, placing bags and other foreign objects over heads or mouths, hiding in household appliances, or throwing hard or sharp objects at each other.
- **Depictions or allusions to weapons and warfare (including the use of guns, knives, bombs, swords, etc.) are not permitted.** In cases where characters wield fantasy objects, such as gadgets or wands, care should be taken to avoid the suggestion of violence. Tropes related to weapons and warfare -- such as characters striking “Charlie’s Angels” poses or blowing “smoke” off of a gun-like object -- are not permitted.
- **Physical and psychological violence is not permitted.**

DEPICTION OF ANIMALS

- **Characters’ treatment of domestic and wild animals should conform to humane safety standards.**
- **Discretion, taste, and restraint should be used whenever depicting the realistic aspects of animals’ life cycles.** These depictions may include: predator/prey consequences, stalking, ambush, kills, carrion, bodily functions (e.g. marking territory, defecation), birth, and egg-laying.

APPROPRIATE AND INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIOR

- **Producers are encouraged to model environmentally responsible decision-making.** Food waste and littering should be avoided. The depiction of reusable water bottles is encouraged.
- **Gratuitous grossness is to be avoided.** Overly gross imagery, and in particular, overly gross imagery that is not necessary to the plot, will not be allowed (e.g. bodily fluids and functions).
- **Scenes or discussions of a character (human or animal) using the toilet, either in a restroom or in other places, are discouraged unless germane to the plot of the story or activity.** Any play on bathroom-related words, such as “pee pee,” “poo poo” or references or allusions to wetting oneself should be avoided.
- **The use, simulation, and/or the implied use of drugs, alcohol, or tobacco is not permitted.**